now the sun appears

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by sojourner (findingkairos)

Summary

The other regions have natural disasters and existential concepts and no offense to them, but Dawn has been stressing about the fact that the space time continuum is embodied in two pokémon for years. They've got nothing on her Legendaries.

Dawn beats up Dialga, Palkia, Giratina, and Arceus to get Ingo back home. It's less dramatic than it sounds, she swears.

(Ingo doesn't agree with her but he's also crying into his brother's shoulder, so she's still winning this one.)

Notes

(*glory at the seams of morning* — my heart in hiding stirred for you)

This fic is based on the rambling thought I had:

You think Ingo adopts people? No. He's too polite. A fifteen-year-old who's fought gods and whose reason for living is spite, though, absolutely would.

See the end of the work for more notes

It starts as a joke, kind of.

“Tell that to your uncle,” someone says. She doesn’t even remember their name or their face, afterwards, just those words ringing in her ears: “Tell that to your uncle.”

She hadn’t had an uncle before, she thinks. She’d had a mom, and a mentor-slash-big-sister figure, and a friend close enough to be her brother, and – and –

And no one else. No one else comes to mind. These are her people, the number small enough to count on one hand.

An uncle sounds nice, she thinks, looking at Jubilife through the window. From the outside, looking in. All these people with their big families, mothers and fathers and aunts and uncles and cousins and extended family. The village is full of people who call each other family.

No one calls her that here. And, if the half-joking half-harsh tone from that Jubilife stranger had been anything: no one calls Ingo that in Pearl Clan, either.

He is the only person to never have been rude to her. The only person who doesn’t whisper behind her back, in fear, in awe, in judgement.

Ride or die, someone had told her once, and she doesn’t remember the name or the face but she remembers the words.

The memories come back to her slowly. As the dex fills up, as she travels the region, as she gets to know these new pokémon and partner with them and train them up and battle side-by-side, she remembers: no one battles like this. Not where she’s from. Not at home.

She’s not from here. She needs to go home.

And eventually she realizes that she’s not the only one.

She doesn’t *quite* recognize it on sight, but it’s close. Close enough that she bites down on her tongue, hard, to stop from asking him questions when he’s in the middle of guiding them through the Coronet Highlands.

This isn’t the time or place. Not when they’re in the middle of trying

to quell frenzied Nobles. Not when she's still trying to keep a lid on her temper from the way that Warden Melli gets on her nerves.

But one day soon – as soon as she has this mess straightened out – she's going to find him and tell him the truth.

A lot happens in the intervening week.

She thinks about it in the back of her head, in the middle of being exiled and going on a wild chase through the region and desperately trying not to die.

The more she does, the more she likes it. He'd fallen from the sky, like her. He'd been and is still called an outsider, like her.

He doesn't remember his past, like she had before something in her brain had jostled loose.

Jubilife had turned on her so easily, after the sky had turned red. There's no sign that Irida thinks of doing the same with Warden Ingo, but she hadn't thought Kamado would do this to her, either.

He'd grumbled and complained and insulted her at every turn, but he'd accepted her work if Cyllene had brought it to him. He'd given her a house and let her work for her keep.

But it hadn't been enough in the end, had it?

Go tell your father, someone in Jubilife had told a child, when complained at about a skinned knee. A growling stomach. Another kid playing too rough. *Go tell your uncle*.

And even if she takes the first step, calling someone something like that is a two-way street.

She is the Champion of Sinnoh – she remembers that now – and she can take care of herself. Ingo can, too – he wouldn't be a Warden otherwise. But just in case something happens to him. Just in case.

And anyway, if his memories don't come back on his own – she had known this region and its Legendaries like the back of her hand, once, out of an abundance of paranoia and a desire to never be caught flat-footed again. She knows what she needs to do.

She faces Dialga alone. She faces Palkia alone.

She turns the sky back on her own, and looks the ninja who'd confessed to thinking of murdering her in the eye on her own, and she walks back into Jubilife, triumphant, alone.

She had been the Champion, and she is again, now twice over. At least now she remembers what it means.

The thing is, Dawn coming here – to Ancient Sinnoh, to Hisui – had also been an accident.

Things are not ideal. She'd had her kit from home because she never goes without it, now, not after having been thrown into a hell void when she'd been twelve and wandering around without drinkable water and warm clothing in the chilling cold of space. She hadn't known what the items had been, but she'd stored them carefully – hidden away, after that first disastrous meeting that'd had her choking on air and scrambling to keep Kamado happy.

But she knows she'll never make Kamado happy. Not with her foreign habits, and foreign accent, and foreign ways of thought. So what's an emergency blanket and a filtering water bottle on top of that?

It's almost not enough. She doesn't have her League team, not even the ones on rotation she'd been training. Not even her Oh Crap I Need To Bailout Ace, as Barry had called Garchomp.

So she builds another one. She'd started to, out of necessity, in order to survive here. But after the Temple – after being welcomed back, and the Arc Phone demanding that she finish an impossible task, almost alone:

She gets serious about it.

That's when she meets Warden Ingo again.

Kamado is exploiting him, she concludes, when Ingo stands out in the rain all day while waiting for challengers that will not come. Not when half the village still live in fear of the monsters beyond their walls, and the other half in fear of the ones inside.

And Kamado is wary of her, too. She knows, he knows she knows. It's a comfortable state of mutually assured destruction, or perhaps just one-way assured destruction, since now she has the Pearl and Diamond Clan's gods in pokeballs, let alone her own region-saving team.

Which is the only reason that when she lures Ingo away from the Training Grounds and to under the nearby trees, Kamado presses his lips together and turns away.

She watches him go out of the corner of her eye. The majority of her attention is on Ingo, as she convinces him to sit a while. Drink some water. Look at the trees with her.

Eventually he agrees. And under the bustle of the village, she says, “Can I tell you a secret?”

Ingo looks at her from under the brim of his hat.

“You’re from the future, like me. And my name is Dawn.”

He mouths it like he recognizes the word. There’s no other recognition yet, but that’s fine. That’s what she’s going to beat up Uxie for.

There’s hope in his face, and Dawn remembers him saying *the man who looks like me*, and she can’t let him down.

“Just between you and me though,” she adds, because that’s important. “I told everyone here that my name is Akari when I first got here because it *is* a nickname, and they were already on the verge of kicking me out of town.” Even right after I landed, she doesn’t say, because Ingo’s eyebrows are already furrowed. There’s no need to upset him further. “But… yeah.” She leans back on her hands, looks at the big blue sky. “You’re from the future, like me.”

Ingo mulls on that for a few moments longer. The first thing he says since she’d first started talking is: “How do you know that? That before I lost my memories, I was from the future?”

At least he isn’t laughing her off immediately. Though that might be the fact that she did summon Dialga, not to mention Palkia, and beat them both into the ground just a few days ago.

And how *couldn’t* she know that he’s from the future? Especially after her memories came loose like papers in the wind? “Your coat and hat. The way you talk. The turns of phrase, the slight accent.” She shrugs, careless, when he continues to stare. “You know how to train pokémon, even though the rest of Hisui still live in fear of them, on some level.”

“Circumstantial evidence.”

It would be easier if he were from her region. She knows anyone who's anyone in Sinnoh. It's not asked of her, but she knows they expect it of her. The Champion is the strongest in the region; she solves problems and lends a hand and smoothes over issues.

Dawn had been learning a handful of other languages when she'd been snatched from her place in the timeline, but she knows some, enough for this: "*Hello, how are you?*"

Ingo startles. It's a whole-body movement: he sits up, turns to face her fully, lifts his head to look at the air next to her head. "What?"

She stays silent.

"…that sounded familiar." He frowns, just a little. "You speak another language?"

"Just a little. Enough to get by. But you have the same accent as Galarian."

"Galarian," Ingo repeats, rolling the word around on his tongue.

"You know you say trains in Galarian." Because Hisuian doesn't have a word for it. Not when it doesn't exist yet. Sinnohan will one day, but that's years from now.

Ingo side-eyes her, one side of his face shaded beneath his hat. "Have you always known your other name? Remembered this other language?"

There's suspicion in his voice, and it hurts something in between her ribs, but she doesn't let it show on her face. She's the Champion, she represents her region. She can't let them down. "No. I started getting bits and pieces, after Lord Arcanine. And then when I went through Uxie's trial, the rest started – coming back." If getting a whole mess of them, numerous and chaotic enough that she hadn't known what's real for a good long while, counted as *coming back*.

She keeps a careful eye on him, and keeps the breath between her teeth when Ingo finally relaxes.

"You're like me, Uncle Ingo," she says at last – another truth freed from the pressure on her lungs – and *that's* the thing that makes him do a double take.

She laughs hard enough to startle Starly from the trees.

She doesn't stop, because Ingo doesn't ask her to, and because it makes Jubilife look at her with less suspicion.

What is it about having a family that makes people trust you more? She doesn't know. She's still a trainer and a researcher and the Hero of Hisui. She still carries Dialga and Palkia on her belt, next to her other hand-crafted pokeballs. She's caught them pokémon partners for help around the village and she's pulled her weight and brought lost people home, and *this* is what lets them relax?

Because now she has a visible weakness. Now she is showing humanity.

Now Kamado looks at her, and then looks at Ingo like he's something to pull apart and puzzle out.

It makes something crawl up her skin, run chills down her spine. But she can't bring herself to stop.

They still don't know why she or Ingo fell from the sky. Volo thinks that finding the truth of all these myths about pokémon will help.

She recognizes the description of some of them, but she keeps quiet. There's no use bringing up the Arc Phone or her mandate again.

Volo asks her to collect more of the Plates that the Nobles of these region have. She's got a nice stack of them in her pack now, heavy and light in turns depending on the color. She's got a sinking feeling there's going to be eighteen of them when she's done.

It's not a decision made easily, but what tips the scales is this:

"I hear that some people in town are calling Warden Ingo your uncle," Volo says.

She looks up. Volo is still smiling back at her, eyebrows raised, helpful.

He looks so much like Cynthia it physically hurts.

She shoves the feeling aside so she can concentrate. "They do?" she replies at last.

"They do." He shifts on his feet, resettling the heavy pack on his

shoulders. “Is there any truth to it?”

“No idea.” She bends back over her dex again, calculating how many pokémon there are left to go. She needs some of the more obscure ones, the ones that are hard to find. She has the sinking feeling she needs to go into the time-space distortions for some of them, but at least she has Palkia with her now if something goes terribly wrong.

“What a shame,” Volo says, and it sounds like he’s talking to someone faraway.

She doesn’t like that. So she cracks her knuckles and resettles on her feet, and when Volo looks at her, she grins at him. “Does it matter?”

Volo blinks first.

“They can call him my uncle all they want,” she says. “It won’t make it any more or less true. But *I* call him uncle, and that’s the important thing.”

The merchant’s eyes sharpen. “Isn’t the perception of others equally as important? Or is it simply the truth if you declare it to be?”

The truth is whatever they make of things like this, she doesn’t say. Nor the harsh words on her tongue: they lost their right to judge me for my relationships the day they threw me out into the wild to survive on my own.

Instead she says, “Something like that is just between two people. It’s nobody else’s business.”

Something shutters in Volo’s expression. She doesn’t know what it is or what’s caused it, but she finds herself gripping her dex all the same, moving her weight to the balls of her feet and getting ready to move.

One moment passes. Then two. Then Volo smiles, and it feels like there’s air again. She doesn’t trust it.

“Well,” Volo says wryly, pretending not to see her unease, “you are the one who brought Dialga and Palkia low, after all. If you declare it so, then it must be true!”

After a fierce afternoon at the Training Grounds, Ingo tilts his head towards the Village. “Would you like to eat something?”

They go to the Wallflower. She manages to be civil with Beni, barely,

but she has one hand on a pokeball under the table and she makes sure to keep her feet flat on the ground. At least when Beni brings the plate of potato mochi he manages to stop from slamming it against the table, like he had last time.

When she looks at him after they get their plates, Ingo looks like he's bit into something sour. She hopes it's not a potato mochi that's been prepared spitefully. As much as Beni seems to distrust her still, Ingo doesn't deserve any of the animosity. She's a Champion and Beni is an adult. They can keep their feud between themselves.

They pass the time in quiet conversation. She spends half of it people watching – the residents of Jubilife, Beni in the back. Ingo in front of her. She has a question to ask, and she calls Ingo uncle, and even with its downsides it's working its intended purpose. But this is important.

Even if it's hard, she thinks to herself, it's important.

After a break in the conversation when they've both stopped eating the mochi – they're leaving half of it untouched but her stomach is in knots and she doesn't feel bad about leftovers; they both have hungry pokémon teams that will eat the rest – she clears her throat.

Ingo gives her his full attention. She knows this, even if Kamado hasn't learned how to read the Warden yet, because Ingo's tilted his head and giving her his ear, literally.

She tightens her grip on her mug of tea and doesn't look at him. "If you could get your memories back," she says quietly, "Would you want to?"

There's a long period of silence. Eventually, Ingo sighs.

"I am functional as I am now," he replies. He is equally as quiet. When she glances up, checking, Ingo hasn't looked away from the door where Beni had disappeared. "But I know I am missing something. A large part of myself. I think I would like to remember, if I can." Then he shrugs and looks at her. "But if I never do," he continues, eyes intent, "then that is also alright. It is what it is."

Without looking away, she asks, "And would you want to go home?"

"Home is not a place." Ingo drums his fingers on the table in thought. After a moment, he tips his hat. "Home is people."

That's not a full answer, and he knows it. She waits him out.

“I think,” he says slowly, carefully, like he is balancing over the chasm in the Alabaster Icelands, “that I would. Like to go home. The Clan has been gracious, but our tracks only aligned recently. They have built their own station, and I believe I have built mine, elsewhere. I would like to see it again.”

And well. When he puts it like that.

“I’ll work on it, Uncle Ingo,” she promises him – just him, just the two of them, quiet under an assassin’s distrustful eyes – and doesn’t elaborate when he presses her.

When she sees them again, Mespirit, Uxie, and Azelf all demand a fight, sight unseen. She catches them and then releases them back into the cave with a glare.

“You know what this means,” she says to each, holding up the pokeball. “The only reason why I’m not dragging you out from the cave is because you helped me, with the Red Chain.”

She’s tempted to take Uxie to Ingo right then and there, but refrains at the last minute. She knows where Uxie lives. They can always come here on their own time, when Ingo is ready.

She catches Heatran, sweating, and manages to pat them on the head before they dip back into the lava. They’re warm.

She heads back to the temple, skirting around the Pearl Settlement, and looks for the giant. The Plates in her pack resonate when they get to the door. Regigas towers over her, lights flashing, but she knows how to hold a pokeball.

The more Legendaries she fights, the more she remembers. She’s done this before. Well, not this *exactly*, but she had been the Champion of Sinnoh. She’d needed to run herd on a multitude of pissed-off pokémon.

No, wait. She *is* still the Champion of Sinnoh. That’s why she’s doing all of this.

She wants to go home, sure, but this is her region and she has a duty. She has a cause.

Cresselia isn’t like the others.

Mespirit, Uxie, and Azelf don't care for much beyond flexing their power in their own domain and lingering in the lakes. Heatran tends to the volcano on Firespit, preventing it from erupting. Regigigas guards the Temple and could not be moved from its place unless she wished for them to move the continents again.

But Cresselia –

She turns the world rose-gold and hazy. Her attacks give throbbing headaches and flashes of memory.

Akari – Dawn – the trainer standing before her does so with nothing more than willpower. Azelf would be proud, she thinks, ducking beneath another of Cresselia's attacks.

"I'm going to fight Arceus," she shouts, "and make them take us home. Will you help me?"

Cressellia drifts down to look her in the eye, a momentary pause in the fighting. *You say us. Who is us?*

She takes the opportunity to stand up properly, catch her breath. "Me," she says when she can speak clearly, "and someone else who shouldn't be here. He came from the future too. He deserves better than this."

Cresselia tosses her head. The moonlight filters through her rings and illuminates her.

She waits for one long heart-stopping moment.

"Who's that?" Rei asks, nervously.

She beams. It's tired but real, because Rei is good people. "This is Cresselia! She's very nice! She's my friend now!"

When she'd tried to put Cresselia's pokeball away, the Psychic-type Legendary had put it right back into her hand with telekenisis. She doesn't know what that means.

But she knows the way that Cresselia lets her stroke her feathers back into order and she knows that when she sleeps, Cresselia lingers around like a personal crescent moon.

She appreciates it, but honestly, Cresselia just – hovers. Which is ironic, since the Legendary does Levitate.

More than that, Cresselia *hovers*, like Dialga and Palkia skulk around, carefully watching the humans scurry on with their lives. They're not like her team, lending her a hand in setting up camp or maintaining the beginnings of routes, but they help her corral the wild Alphas into behaving and they spot her when she goes haring off on Arceus's mad quest.

They don't always listen to her. Then again, they listen to her more than they do anyone else.

She makes them food and smiles in thanks when they bring her rare plants and doesn't comment when they disappear every so often. Avoiding the Clans that haunt their footsteps, hoping for a glimpse of their gods, probably.

She understands the feeling. She's running away from her share of uncomfortable gazes, too.

It gets to the point where Ingo offers his tent for shelter, after watching her pitch up her own four nights in a row instead of going to the Village.

She always hesitates when she sees him and waits for him to bring it up first. She doesn't want to overstep. She has a tent of her own, and she might call him Uncle but surely he values his own peace and quiet.

But Ingo keeps asking, and he keeps frowning in that way of his when she keeps hesitating, and somehow she lies awake staring at the ceiling of his tent the next night.

Here, inside his own walls, he's noisy. Somehow she hadn't expected that. But he murmurs to his team and talks with them, back and forth in a dialogue where neither of them are speaking the same language but they both know what they mean anyway.

There's no yelling or pointed comments or even a side-eye her way. It's soothing.

He gets ready for bed and she follows his movements around the tent with her eyes closed. "Safety checks all complete," he's telling Gliscor, having triple checked the ashes of the firepit. "Pulling into the terminal now."

Her team is in their pokeballs, holstered in her sash lying next to her

side. She has one arm hooked around it out of habit – no offense to Uncle Ingo, but sometimes she wakes up and needs to move immediately.

There's no big cat next to her, but Gengar is outside and wandering somewhere. Gliscor is in the tent proper. Between the two of them, nothing's going to so much as whisper in the direction of this tent.

Ingo is rustling the blankets on his bed, the soft sounds of another human being close by, and it's warm.

She's just dozed off when she hears something hissing, and she wakes up all at once, rolling to her feet, looking for the fire or the ghost or the poisonous pokémon –

But there's nothing there. There's just the darkness of the tent and the moonlight through the cracks and Ingo, shivering.

Ingo.

Gliscor is bracketed over him, as though he could intercept whatever is coming for his trainer. He's looking at her, tail primed to strike, probably when she'd woken up suddenly and moved. She gives him a little finger-wave, a *hello, you're worried about him too*. Gliscor blinks once, slowly, and relaxes his tail. He goes back to his vigil watching the light through the cracks in the tent.

Ingo is still shivering under his blankets. She doesn't know if it's because he's cold or because of ill dreams. Well, she can fix one of those at least.

Careful of the watchful Gliscor, she thumbs open a pokeball. Cresselia spills out, spinning in place, and when there's no immediate danger she floats over to her with a questioning hum.

It's so much easier with pokémon. "Would you mind staying up with me tonight?" she asks, quiet.

Cresselia doesn't glance at Ingo, but it's close. She flicks her rings anyway.

Dawn smiles. "Thank you."

When he wakes up, she gives Ingo one of Cresselia's feathers. "A wish for good dreams," she says, and doesn't let him protest before she

folds it into his hands.

He looks like he's about to say something, opening and closing his mouth, but he doesn't. He glances between Gliscor and Cresselia, now holding a conference between themselves, and her.

She makes sure he has a secure grip on the feather and the cord that turns it into a necklace before she tugs him outside.

Together, they watch the sun rise. It's the most peaceful she's been in a while, and she only needs to thank Cresselia for part of it.

He never tells her to stop calling him Uncle, but Ingo gets her a new coat from the seamstress, one in a similar style to his.

She gets back at him by tracking down fabric that looks close enough to his ragged coat's to patch it up and bribing the seamstress until she fixes it.

He gets back at her by finding a scrap of Reaper Cloth, for Dusknoir's dex entry.

She finds an extra Twisted Spoon, and smiles when he solemnly hands it to his Alakazam.

It goes on, for a while.

She stays at his tent when she's in the area, bringing ingredients and berries and one time, her sad attempt at poffins in a place that hasn't invented them yet.

He checks in on her whenever she calls Lady Sneasler for a ride, wearing the patched-up coat and hat.

Eventually someone notices. Of course they do. The flip side of being allied with a small town full of gossip and hostility for outsiders is that they *notice things*.

"You are the best that Hisui has to offer," Kamado says, when he asks her to teach pokémon handling at the Training Grounds. She's no longer someone who can be ordered around by the Galaxy Corps. She knows this, Cyllene knows this, Kamado knows this. Everyone knows this.

But Ingo is at the Training Grounds, and she doesn't want to leave him alone.

And anyway, maybe this will help Rei get over his fear. At first it had been funny. Now, it's just getting kind of sad.

After the seventeenth Plate, Volo tracks her down. Asks her a question. Tilts his head in the direction of the Temple like it's something interesting, like it's not just ruins, like it isn't the place she beat two gods into the ground to get them to stop throwing tantrums.

She finds Ingo before she leaves.

"Volo wanted me to go to the Temple of Sinnoh," she says. "To show me something, he said."

Ingo chews on that for a moment.

She calls him Uncle, mostly-serious because he still hasn't said anything about it yet. Because she thinks that the lines on his face are less stressed now. That the way he makes sure she has enough food and water for her outbound trips is what he'd do for any other traveler, in his capacity as Warden.

She's fully aware that she might be making stuff up. She knows that.

She misses Lucario something fierce, for a moment: a blinding moment that boils the blood in her veins, straightens her spine, carves out something from between her ribs. For the friendship, yes, of course, and for the reassurance and the care and the teamwork. But also for the way that Lucario had been able to tell her if something is real or not.

But she has practice at pushing down those emotions, and after the moment, she sets it aside.

"Be careful," Ingo says at last. His hand spasms by his side like he'd thought about doing something with it before he'd thought better of it.

He's the only one to tell that to her. Everyone else says *Good luck* or *Good hunting* or *Don't forget what I asked for, thank you so much!* They all think she's going to be fine. And to be fair, nine times out of ten, she *is* fine.

But it's because Ingo says things like this that she calls him Uncle, and she tells him that.

When she leaves, she's almost convinced she's not imagining the smile on his face.

Volo calls the Temple pillars *spears*.

She knows that word. She knows what he's talking about. Centuries from now, they will call this place *Spear Pillar* and they will know it to be ruins.

He turns around, and he's smiling, but there is nothing behind the eyes.

He wants to meet Arceus. For a long moment, she thinks about showing him the texts on the Arc Phone. Telling him her suspicions. Inviting him to the party that will be beating a god at their own game.

But then Volo says, "If you want to keep this world from disappearing, then face me in battle!" and she realizes: ah. Volo's simply gone crazy.

She doesn't wait for him to meet her gaze, the way a modern, civilized trainer would.

He calls himself a wielder of pokémon. A *wielder*. As though there is a way to wield your friends.

She drops two pokeballs. Blissey and Goodra both spill out in a flash of light, staring down Volo and his team.

"I don't usually do this," she says to Volo, and now she meets him in dead in the eye. His face is unreadable. There is fire in her veins. "But for you, I think I can make an exception."

Giratina spills through the rift in space. There's anger in the lines of them. They glare at the two Legendaries by her side with hatred.

"You don't need to listen to him," she tells them, and ignores Volo. He's turning a delightful shade of red, and right now she can hardly bear to look at him. "Walk away now, and nobody gets hurt."

Giratina screams. Well, this one couldn't be the one she'd faced in Sinnoh, heart aching and following in Cyrus's footsteps. No, that would be too easy, wouldn't it?

She shakes out her hands until they stop trembling, and white-knuckles the items in her pack. Panic is the mind-killer, she reminds

herself. She is the Champion of Sinnoh. She has beaten worse odds before.

Cresselia releases herself, taking her place on the field. Then Luxray. Gengar. Dialga. Palkia.

Decidueye, the first one she'd met on this journey, comes out last. She ruffles her feathers, resettles the leaves of her hat, and when she glances up the look in her eye is so much like Ingo's that Dawn's breath catches in her throat.

"Wh-" Volo sputters. "I thought – do you have no *honor*?"

Refocus. Refocus. "What's honor worth when you're trying to save the world?" Dawn asks, back on track. "And really, *you're* one to talk about honor when you almost brought about the end of the world, first."

Volo snarls, all surprise now forgotten, and that's that.

It's one of the most difficult fights she's ever been in. But her team is strong and she trusts them, she *loves them*, because that's the first tenet of being a trainer: she loves her team, and she wants them to be the very best that they can be. Previously misguided Legendaries and all.

And for her, for each other, for themselves: they are.

It helps, she thinks, that maybe on some level, Giratina doesn't want to fight them. Maybe on some level the Legendary knows about the Arc Phone in her pocket and the mandate from heaven, on what she needs to do if she wants to go back home.

In the end, exhausted, the Temple grounds ruined and the both of them bloody, Giratina lets her catch them in a pokeball. It shakes once, twice, before lying still.

Volo sags in place, boneless. He avoids falling over by sheer virtue of Dawn striding across the burned and frozen field to haul him up by the front of his shirt.

She doesn't punch him, but it's a close thing. Instead she leans in close, just shy of pressing their foreheads together, and *stares*.

For a second time, it's Volo who looks away first. But this time, she doesn't feel any sense of victory or satisfaction. Just bone-deep exhaustion, and grief, that this is the way that things had gone.

Somewhere behind her, one of her pokémon hits the button on Giratina's ball and releases them. Without looking, she pulls out her Full Restores and lets them go into the pink haze of Cresselia's psychic powers. They've got this.

In the meantime, she has *this*.

She shakes him, and Volo's head flops on top of his spine like a ragdoll's. "You tried to *erase* the *world* because you thought it wasn't *perfect*?"

Volo closes his eyes. Maybe he's tired, too. Her arms are definitely tired from holding him up, so she drops him.

It's only a few feet to the ground, but he falls harshly on the stone floor. She tries not to feel guilty about that. Instead she sits cross-legged, loosely, and feels the rest of the adrenaline crashing down on her.

This time she pulls a berry out of her pack for herself, and tosses a spare one at Volo's face.

"What?" he asks, staring down at the Cheri berry in his hands.

"Oh, you're not off the hook yet," she replies, wolfing down her own berry. She's got a few more rations in there that she can plow through before she needs to go down the Temple stairs for actual food, so she does. "But right now I'm too hungry to deal with you."

Volo stares. He eats the berry, thoughtfully. Between bites he gives her a speech about how he's lost to her – true – and that he wants to ask Arceus a lot of questions – which, same – and how he's going to go and wander the rest of the region looking for answers.

He's a man out of time, too, and he's in her region now. Technically, she still has a duty to him.

Technically, he's just tried to end the world and failed because she stopped him.

She wishes there was an arrest system here, like there had been in the future for Cyrus. But until then, she has the next best thing.

After she lets him finish his speech and give her the last Plate, Volo tries to walk away.

Healed up and with her typical boundless energy again, Luxray drags him back by the back of his shirt, like he's a wayward shinx that needs scolding.

Giratina stares, wide-eyed, but doesn't move to intervene.

"You tried to end the world, and you called yourself a *wielder of pokémon*," Dawn says at last to Volo, dusting off her hands. She gets up. She's shorter than him, especially now that he's dangling from Luxray's jaws four feet off the ground, but she looks up and the rest of her team looks down at him and in the middle of it, Volo gulps. "And as one of Jubilife Village's training instructors, I can't let that stand."

She gets back to the village and has Lord Braviary drop her off just inside the gates.

Ingo is waiting there. "What *happened* to you?" he asks, dismayed, wide-eyed beneath the shadow of his hat.

She tilts her head. He gestures at her face. She puts the back of her hand to her lip and, ah, yeah. The blood comes away only a little bit sticky.

"Things," she says.

She doesn't know how to explain it. She'd let Volo go, only letting him keep the pokémon on his team that had showed true attachment to him, as defined by Cresselia's serene psychic judgement and Gengar's skimming of fears. But he knows that he's unwelcome in the Clan settlements now, and as soon as she has room to breathe she needs to let Irida and Adaman know that she's exiled someone from their grounds on all of Hisui's behalf.

But Ingo looks at her with wide eyes and concern. No pity, no fear, no indication that he thinks any less of her for her injured state.

He bullies her into sitting down in the almost empty house that Kamado had given back and she had never moved back into, and pulls out her first-aid kit, and tends to her wounds himself. He doesn't try to take her to Pesselle. She wonders if he'd noticed that she has a habit of asking Blissey to heal her wounds instead of going to Pesselle, but she bites her tongue before she can ask him outright.

He's quiet, the entire time. She tries not to tense – it's Ingo. She calls him Uncle and he lets her and she has a coat in his jacket's style and

he's wearing a Cresselia feather.

He ties off the last bandage, carefully but securely. The minimum required to do its job but not enough to hurt.

His hands are kind and the man himself is kind and he deserves better than being stuck out of place and time.

"How long will you do this?" Ingo asks at last. "Will you reroute at all? If you continue down these tracks in this manner, you will surely perish."

Dawn turns around and squints at him. *What's it to you*, she almost asks, before she bites the words from her tongue.

Ingo stares. And then he asks, "Would you help me get my memories back?"

She takes Ingo to the cave – there will be less time for Uxie to argue if she has the one she wants the favor for in front of them – but when Uxie asks for the trial again, saying *all favors have a price* –

"No," she says, before Ingo can.

Because this is what it means. This is the duty of a Champion: you do the things that need to be done, and let everyone else go back to their normal lives.

And then Ingo says, "I'll do it."

"*Absolutely not*," she repeats, and doesn't dare look over at Ingo. Not when she's staring down Uxie and waiting for them to sweat. "You're going to restore Ingo's memories, everything, in full, without any damage or headache or any ill effects for him afterwards." Without looking away, she pulls out the pokeball in her pack, the one she'd marked with a third of the Red Chain. "Or you're going to answer to *me*."

Uxie bobs in the air like a buoy, thinking. Ingo steps closer in the meantime, moving in her peripheral vision, and the only reason why she doesn't startle bad enough to hit him is because she's still in a staring contest with a lake guardian.

"These are my memories, Miss Akari," he says. Then he corrects himself: "Miss Dawn. I should be the one to embark on this trial for

them. And isn't it unfair to ask a favor of Uxie without offering anything first?"

"I've already done their trial. Compared to helping me make the Red Chain, this should be easy. This is Uxie's whole *domain*."

And either way, it's not Ingo's fault that he's missing his memories. By pokémon or by accident, it doesn't matter.

Dawn can help, so she *should* help. That's the cornerstone that society is founded upon. That's what it means to be Champion.

Some days it's the only thing getting her out of bed. Some days it's the only thing keeping her going.

In the end, Uxie agrees to help, of course. Dawn will swear until the end of time that the fact that she had Luxray out, Alpha-large teeth ready to Crunch, had nothing to do with it.

When they get home, Ingo passes out. Memory reintegration, Uxie had said. It's going to be rough until it's done.

Dawn putters around the tent, stepping carefully around Gliscor, putting dinner together so that Ingo has something to eat when he wakes up.

She's just pulling the soup off the fire when he stirs. "Good timing," she tells him. "Do you think you can keep anything down?"

He groans lowly in answer.

"Let's start with water then." The filtering water bottle has seen more use than it's been rated for, these last six months, but it's still better than nothing. She pours Ingo a cup and helps him wrap his fingers around it. "How're you feeling?"

Ingo squints. The tent is dark with just the one lit lantern, but Dawn shifts until she's casting a shadow in front of him. The furrow between his eyebrows goes away, just a little bit.

He takes a sip of his water and swallows. "You said your name is Dawn."

She tilts her head. She's not sure where he's going with this.

"I know that name." He closes his eyes, thinking. She lingers for a

moment, then takes a few steps back. Just enough to give him space, but not enough to take away the shadow blocking out the light. "Dawn, Dawn… wait…"

He opens his eyes and stares her down. "You're from Sinnoh."

"Yup." She risks moving her weight to one side. When the light comes half over his face, he squints, but not as much as earlier. She moves the rest of the way to tend to the soup again.

"You're the *Champion of Sinnoh*," he breathes, and then blanches. "The fifteen-year-old Champion."

She looks up from the two bowls she's ladling out. "That's what got caught in your brain?"

"So many of the Champion challengers are teenagers and children these days," Ingo says, rubbing a hand over the fuzz on his chin, "but not many of them keep the title instead of returning it to the previous holder."

He means that not many choose to take up the duties of the Champion. But he's still looking at her, so she gives him a one-shoulder shrug and swaps his empty cup for the bowl of soup.

That distracts him for a little while, but not for long enough. Truly, the train-related phrases and metaphors fit him.

She's leaning against the sole chair in the tent when Ingo puts down his bowl and asks: "How do you know the Legendaries?"

How else? "Because I had to fight them before I became Champion. Cynthia helped, but it was a big mess. And then I became Champion, and I'm the one who talks to them still, so I need to do this. I'm the only one who can do this."

Ingo stares her down. She meets his gaze as best she can.

"I am the Champion of Sinnoh," she says again, because she needs him to understand. With his memories back he should know full well what she means, and she needs him to remember this. "Right now, in Hisui – in Ancient Sinnoh – I am *your* champion."

"You're fifteen," Ingo says. His voice is pressed flat, all emotion starched out of it.

And technically he's not wrong. She's turned fifteen shortly before arriving here, and she's only counted six full moons in Hisui. But: "I'm fifteen *and* the Champion."

He pulls the brim of his hat over his eyes and considers this for a moment. She tries not to fidget. Eventually he says, "Are you the Champion because you are the strongest?"

And she knows where he's going with this, she's not stupid, but she replies, unable to help herself: "That's how it goes, isn't it?"

"So if I beat you, you will stop trying to hurtle down these tracks in a one-car train."

That's a lot better than what people usually say, when she tells them that she's Champion. And maybe he has a point. Maybe she doesn't need to do this alone. But she is still the one who beat down the incarnations of space and time into the ground. She is the one who bullied a lake guardian into being kind. She is the one who is going to beat the living daylights out of *the god of creation* to send them home.

So she says, "Try me."

He makes her work for it, because unlike the gods, his pokémon are partnered. A second pair of eyes and ears and instinct to keep them safe. But if she isn't good enough, she can't save the region. The world. The one lone man trying his best to help her.

The fight pulls at everything she's got, and then some, and towards the end she's making up tactics on the fly, more in sync with her pokémon here, more wild, more instinctual – nothing like a League battle, absolutely demolishing the safety regulation line – and she believes in her team, she does, she loves them, so much it *hurts*.

And it works.

Somehow, it works.

Ingo had become the Warden of a Noble in a barren, hostile land and he had been, according to him, the head of a battle facility. Even now, even here, she bets he could give the Frontier Brains of her region a run for their money. If he'd had his regular team, it would have been a nightmare to battle him.

But she's still the Champion, and this is her responsibility, damn it.

She will carry it and her team will help her carry it, and even if they are not the team she'd won the League Championship with, they are the ones helping her keep this region together.

So she wins, and then she says, "We good?"

Ingo recalls his last pokémon. He's breathing hard. The brim of his hat is tilted back, towards the top of his head, and there's a wild look in his eyes – Dawn recognizes that look, adrenalin and excitement, because she's seen it in Barry and in the mirror before – but he's still razor-sharp. Intent.

Eyes on the prize.

"Bravo," he says hoarsely, and swallows hard. Dawn digs around in her pack for a spare canteen. "Truly, you have arrived at the destination known as victory."

He takes the water when she gives it to him, drinks heavily from it. Starts pulling out Potions and Hyper Potions from his bag to heal up his team again.

"I'm going to make sure you get home," she says when they're surrounded by their teams, quiet under their covering bustle, because that's the best that she can give. If Arceus only lets one person go back home per battle, then she's going to make damn sure that he goes first.

He looks up from tending to Tangrowth. "You are the Champion," he says. Pride and sadness war in his voice. It's an acknowledgement. "But that doesn't mean you have to do everything alone."

And he'd lost, and that wasn't the deal, the outcome of the battle is to be honored after every fight – but she's tired and he's here and they're about to go home, as soon as this is over. What's the matter with letting him help a little. If all else fails, she'll throw him through the portal and go harass Dialga until they bend the rules.

"I am convinced," Ingo adds, "that a battle against Arceus is only fair if it is at least two versus one. Perhaps even three versus one."

Dawn has to stifle laughter. "Where would you get a third? Rei's still scared of his own pikachu, and the others aren't any better."

Ingo squints. Eventually he says, "My brother, if he were here. But he is not. So we will be two, against one. Still better than one versus

one.”

She considers it. He hadn’t been there for Dialga or Palkia or Giratina or any of the other Legendaries. He doesn’t have the experience, standing up in the mounting Pressure with the air turning to lead in the lungs and the buckling of the knees and the knowledge, staring a personification in the eye, that Legendary pokémon exist on a separate level from the rest of the world.

There’s a reason that the Diamond and Pearl Clan had considered their pokémon deities, and there’s a reason the rest of them are surrounded by myths.

But she’d gotten through the fight with Volo through breaking social norms, and she’d gotten through this one with Ingo with a lot of bruises.

He deserves to beat up Arceus a little bit, too.

“Fine,” she says, and pretends not to see Ingo’s shoulders slump. “But we have to convince Arceus somehow to let us, instead of just throwing us out.”

Ingo stares into the middle distance for a moment. Then he nods decisively to himself, and tilts his head to smile at her. “Allow me to plan the route for that,” he tells her, and doesn’t elaborate when she tries to rib it out of him. His lips are sealed, and his plans are left alone at assuring her he’s thought them through.

And, well.

Dawn has backup plans if all else goes wrong. She knows the pokémon, she knows the legends.

If Dialga drags its feet, there’s Celebi. Alternatively, she can blackmail them using Palkia and Giratina. If Arceus throws a fit, she will track down Mew. She will track down Kyogre and Groudon and Rayquaza and anyone else she needs to, to pressure Arceus, if she must.

Arceus might have given her the mandate and the implied reward that comes with winning, but there’s a world after winning, as Ingo himself likes to point out.

She can’t wait to see it.

After she stands still and stares into the middle distance during a particularly cutting passive-aggressive lecture from Kamado, Ingo punches the man in the face.

She grabs Ingo by the sleeve and drags him away from where Kamado is sprawled in the dirt, hissing "*Why'd you do that?*" He has no duty; he has no need.

"Because he hurt you," Ingo says, and oh, it isn't about his position at all. He's just one of those people.

Realistically, she knows Kamado could easily have bodily harmed her or Ingo in retaliation. Practically, their pokémon could wipe the floor with his, let alone the squishy human.

"We're establishing the social norm right now," she says instead, because it's true. "If we start punching people because they deserve it, Kamado would be unrecognizable."

Ingo's face had been stern as she'd spoken, but it cracks by the end of her sentence. His eyes are wider, the frown on his face is pronounced. Most people would think that he's upset.

"Fine," Ingo says, barely keeping himself from laughing. Too bad for him, she's claimed him as Uncle, she knows what he's doing. "But the next time he steps foot in the Training Grounds, he is learning battle manners."

That's more like it. "Full steam ahead," Dawn agrees, and does laugh when he frowns even harder.

She has to tell him about Volo, eventually. The ex-merchant had gone forgotten while they'd been working on restoring Ingo's memories to him, but Ingo's mind is like a steel trap. Nothing truly gets past him.

Now, watching him work Rei furiously through his paces alongside his pikachu in lieu of a certain blond merchant to chew out, she thinks Ingo would have punched Volo too if she hadn't beaten up Volo first.

Volo had stolen the face of her mentor and used it to do terrible things. He'd taken versions of *her team* and done terrible things. Things that Cynthia and she had specifically stopped Cyrus from doing.

Cynthia would be pulling her disappointed face for this one. Dawn

hopes she gets to see it.

It means, too, that Ingo insists on being there when she decides to talk to the Legendaries still skulking around about battling their Creator.

“I’m going to fight Arceus,” she tells them, far enough away from the Village and any other Settlement that neither Galaxy Corps nor the Clans can say anything about her speaking with their gods like they are people.

Dialga folds down their legs to kneel and look her in the eye. Palkia wheels around to stare at Ingo, who to his credit, doesn’t back down.

Giratina twists in the air, shadow tendrils fluttering like ribbons. They circle behind her back and ducks in close to the right side of her face, staring.

She snorts and flicks Dialga on the nose, smiling when they sneeze. For Giratina, she’s a little gentler, putting her hand on their side.

“I’m going to fight Arceus,” she says again, “and I could really use your help. Will you lend me your strength?”

She’s fed these Legendaries before, brushed down their fur, helped clean out beneath their claws. She knows that Dialga likes to gossip with Decidueye, and that Giratina and Gengar have some kind of weird friendship going on. Palkia sticks to themself, but she knows how they like their poffins.

Dialga comes close again, slowly. She lets them dip their head, closer and closer, until their forehead is pressed to hers. Dialga is gentle for their size, and cold.

Giratina looks back and forth between her and Dialga, confusion palapable in the body language.

But then Dialga says *Yes*, quiet and just for her, and withdraws back into their pokeball.

Dawn doesn’t look at Giratina. She turns instead to Palkia, who is next. When they notice her looking, they slap their tail against the ground, once, like Luxray might when excited. *Yes*, they say also, and are gone in a flash of light.

She turns to Giratina then at last. The Renegade is peering at her closely, red eyes gleaming. Then they press into the palm she still has

on their side, tendrils wrapping around her wrist, and when they breathe out she is cloaked in shadow for a moment.

With pleasure, murmurs a voice scratchy with what she would call disuse in a human. When Giratina leaves, it's with a parting tug on her hair.

Three for three. Dawn breathes in deeply for the first time since she's released the three Legendaries. When she's certain she's breathing normally again, she turns around.

Ingo is standing still, wide-eyed, but when he notices her looking his way he tilts his hat at her. "Bravo," he says, at announcement volume. His voice doesn't shake. There's something else in his voice that she can't identify. "Thank to you, Miss Dawn, we have our thirds."

Her, and Ingo, and the three Legendaries of Sinnoh will walk into a fight with god. It's the start of a joke whose punchline Cynthia would do a double take at, she thinks, and smiles just thinking about it.

When she finishes the dex, she doesn't go to Laventon first. She goes to Ingo.

"It's time," she tells him on the Training Grounds, in full view of everyone and Arceus.

The other Corps members there look confused. Ingo doesn't. He tilts down his cap and nods to her firmly.

It doesn't take long for them both to put their affairs in order enough to take a hike to Mount Coronet.

"Are you ready?" Ingo asks her in the ruins of the Temple.

He's talked his way into this after all. She'd thought about going without him, in the end. Just getting up in the hours before dawn – ha – and calling Lord Braviary for a ride to the Temple.

But Ingo has been keeping a careful eye on her ever since she came to the Grounds and told him she had finished the mandate, and half her team have been usurped to his agenda.

So here they are. She double checks her kit: blanket, water, extra pokeballs. Her first aid kit from her surveyor work.

Ingo is by her side, and he is easy on his feet, limbs loose, fingers

relaxed. But there's a fire in his eyes that she feels in her veins.

"Ready," she says, and pulls out the Flute to play.

The notes build a stairway made of light, spiraling onwards and upwards, past the clouds. No, fading *into* the clouds, as though there's a haze or a mirage and it's affecting visibility.

"The tracks are laid out cleanly for us," Ingo notes. He pulls ahead first and puts a foot on the lower step before she can. It's just an outline in the air, like sunlight made solid, but when he shifts his weight it holds.

"I'm presuming it goes into Arceus's Domain," Dawn says, because she has to. She had thought the Flute would summon Arceus here, into the Temple, instead of a path upwards. This is more dangerous than she'd thought.

But when she opens her mouth to tell Ingo this, he beats her to it. He puts both feet on the first step and turns to look her in the eye. "I am still with you," he tells her, and holds out a hand.

She takes it.

The walk up takes forever and only a few moments, simultaneously. Some more god-level weirdness. Dawn is about to swear, out loud even, when she catches the first glimpse of the golden horns.

Arceus stares down at them impassively. They tower in the air, and the light surrounding them is so bright, it's like staring into the sun.

When they speak, it rings in her ears:

Only the Chosen is allowed on these hallowed grounds for a fight.

"I'm her uncle," Ingo says, for the first time. No hesitation. No sputtering or stammering in front of the Creator.

Dawn chokes on her own spit.

Arceus squints. The air itself grows heavy. Dawn locks her knees and breathes through it. *Thou art lying.*

Next to her, Ingo has straightened to his full height. He's looking up but he makes it not matter. "I would never lie about something as important as this."

Arceus considers them both. Then the light ripples around them, and a droning sound starts up from somewhere, loud enough to rattle the platform beneath their feet.

The stars flare above their heads.

Dawn throws up an arm to shield her eyes, hears more than sees Ingo doing the same. When the light dies down, there's a stack of balms in front of them.

She looks up, wide-eyed. Ingo just looks at the balms for a moment, before he nods once, and pulls out a pokeball.

"Check safety," Ingo intones, and Dawn checks everything in her pockets one more time, ignoring the balms that Arceus wants them to use. Her uncle's recitation is steady and rhythmic, easy, and it sounds like she's always heard him say it: "Everything's ready! Aim for victory!"

She hits the buttons for the pokeballs of her team, one after the other.

Ingo points, and his team roars along with him. "All aboard!"

She is the Champion of Sinnoh. No one from her region had given her this specific duty. But she is the only one to have faced down Dialga and Palkia – both times – and lived. She is the one who'd befriended them. She is the one who had brought them down from their pedestals of concepts, of lives as blinks in time, of memories as singular points in space.

Fighting fair is for pokémon battling in general. When she is fighting for a region, for a person, for the sanctity of the world - for Ingo to go back home –

Akari, living in fear of the village that once exiled her, wouldn't rock the boat. She'd be nice, polite, helpful at all turns. She wouldn't even think of fighting unfairly.

But Dawn has a mission, and when she has a mission, she doesn't fight fair. She beats people up.

It takes the combined might of Dialga, Palkia, and Giratina, in addition to her League-standard team of six, as well as Ingo's Alpha pokémon team, but they manage to do the impossible.

They make Arceus eat dirt.

Enough, the god says, when Ingo's Kleavor smacks them into the ground again. *Enough!*

Ingo puts up his hand to call off his team. Dawn doesn't bother. Giratina is having too much fun wrecking the floor of Arceus's Domain with Earth Power.

Enough! Arceus says again, and Giratina throws their head back and roars.

"Nice," Dawn says, when her ears stop ringing. Ingo pulls his hands away from his ears, and she looks over at him, apologetic; but he waves it off with a shrug. "Giratina, do you think you could –" Giratina wends their way back to her and settles down behind her, making a point. "Thank you."

It's weird, staring down at Arceus, but Ingo is slowly making his way over to her and Dawn grabs for his hand before she realizes she's doing it.

Ingo doesn't pull away. He folds her hand into his and holds on tight.

"I did what you asked for," she yells at Arceus, who is now surrounded. Dialga and Palkia stand tall, imperious, while Giratina writhes back and forth in the air like a gyarados above its lake, slow and hypnotic. "I sought out all pokémon, completed the damn dex, took down the world-ending villain. Again."

Thou didst, Arceus agrees. *Thou wert a most splendid Chosen One*.

"But I didn't ask to be," she says. "You brought me here, and wiped my memories – wiped *Uncle's* memories – and just expected me to finish your quest!"

And thou hast brought me joy, demonstrating unflagging devotion to a goal to see it through.

"That is not the point," Ingo says. "The point is that if you wished for a battle, you should have asked."

"I would have done it," Dawn says, at the end of her rope and heartsick, "if you'd just *asked first.*"

Arceus blinks. Ingo whirls around and says, sharply, *"What?"*

“I would have come here and gone on this quest,” Dawn reiterates, eyes only for the Creator who doesn’t understand the minds of humans, “if you had been nice and asked first. You didn’t need to bring anyone else into it.”

Thou speaketh of thy Uncle, Arceus murmurs. *Alas, his passage occurred outside of my sight.*

“You’re saying you didn’t know about him time traveling?” Dawn gestures wildly. She knows that Ingo is creeping closer, that Dialga and Palkia have joined their sibling in pacing the Domain. Her team keep their positions, staring down a god.

Dost thou have a wish? Arceus asks. Their voice is mild but she knows what they’re doing, and they know she knows.

“You can do two things to make it up to me,” she says anyway, because Arceus had brought it up first.

Arceus blinks slowly. *What dost thou desire?*

“First, I want us – me and Uncle Ingo – to be able to go home. The same place where we came from, without any dimensional problems.”

And the second?

Dawn digs in her pack and pulls out a pokeball.

Faced with stares from two full teams and three of their Children, Arceus goes into the ball with little fuss.

When she looks up, Ingo’s jaw has dropped.

“We did it, Uncle,” Dawn says, and that snaps him out of it. She opens her arms, and he pulls her into a hug.

“Dawn, I-” he manages to start, and then he’s cut off when the rest of their pokémon dogpile them.

“So…” she scuffs her foot against hard light. She’s not sure yet if she trusts the platform, but she doesn’t want to move just yet. She’s too tired. “Am I – are you – can I still call you –”

Ingo’s hand hovers in the air. She nods. He lowers his hand to grip her shoulder and squeezes it, gently. “I do not lie,” he tells her softly. “I do not say anything I do not mean. I was flattered when you called me

Uncle, and if you will have me, I am proud to call you my niece."

Arceus is still in the background somewhere, getting scolded by three of their Children as well as Cresselia, but she forgets all about them in favor of hugging Ingo – Uncle Ingo – one more time.

She can't take any of the pokémon back home with her. They are used to the open sky and the brutal wild; the cities and their domestication would be hell on them. *Everything* would be hell on them. The noise, the lights. The pollution and the spread of civilization in the region's untamed lands. The changed environment itself.

It wouldn't be fair to them. They wouldn't be happy. They are wild pokémon at heart, not domesticated like almost all her team at home – almost all pokémon at home – and when she leaves, they will be wild again.

She arranges to give them all a proper send-off, in between settling her affairs with the Clans and with Laventon and Rei and Cyllene.

And when she's sure that no one is following her, not even Beni on Kamado's behalf, she goes back to the Lakes and to Firespit and to Snowpoint.

At each place, in front of each Legendary, she crushes the pokeball she had caught them in beneath her heel.

"Stay safe," she tells them, because she refuses to be the reason that another Team – or another Volo – is able to bring about the end of the world again.

She does the same for her pokémon team, the day before she leaves. Luxray licks her from knees to head, one long swipe like she's one of her shinx, before she goes. Gengar chuckles and vanishes into the night, in the direction of Kamado's house. Goodra practically runs back to reclaim its territory, but not without covering her in enough slime to require a bath to wash off. Blissey waves cheerfully and wanders off to find Pesselle, who will need to get over her fear, Dawn thinks, and become the Nurse Joy who is one of the pillars of modern society.

Cresselia floats close enough for a hug, her psychic power blanketing Dawn's shoulders like a physical thing. She presses a feather to Dawn's hand before she goes.

Giratina rips open another hole in the air, but the screech they throw over their shoulder before disappearing is somehow fond.

Decidueye chooses to stay in the Village, broadly, and with Rei, specifically. She approves of the choice. She hopes that the two will get along well, and that Rei will look after Decidueye as much as the owl will look after him.

At the end, it's just her and Ingo and Dialga and Palkia left. The revered gods of the Clans, she thinks, now a send-off party of divine proportions.

Uncle Ingo has one hand on her shoulder for some reason. She's not sure why. She'd gone and crushed the Legendaries's pokeballs by herself, but that had been a security measure. She's done with the things that need secrecy.

She's ready to go home.

"Are you ready?" Uncle Ingo asks, quietly.

She's given the rest of her supplies to Rei in the hopes that he can make use of it. The completed pokedex and all her sketchbooks have gone to Laventon. She'd tried to return the ten-star badge and her Galaxy Corps identification card to Cyllene, only to be refused.

Her house in the Village will return to the Survey Corps, to be used by someone else. She has her kit, and what things came from the future with her. Adaman and Irida and the rest of the Clans had dinner and a toast last night, and they'll be sleeping off the alcohol this early in the morning.

Whatever else she wants to keep, she has pictures on her Arc Phone. All her loose ends are tied.

Dawn nods.

Uncle Ingo nods back, sharply, and together they turn to Dialga and Palkia.

In sync themselves, the two gods of Hisui – of Sinnoh – turn their heads up to the sky.

They go to the Pokecenter because that's what you're supposed to do when something bad happens. If you fall ill, you go to the center. If

you need a lift home, you go to the center.

If you come back from the past while bleeding, it's definitely time to head for the center.

"In Dialga's good name, Uncle," she hisses to Uncle Ingo as they slam through the Pokecenter doors, "if a wild golbat is what gets you I'm going to show everyone all the photos of you drunk."

"No," Uncle Ingo says, slightly slurred with poison but with coherently wild eyes.

"Yes," Dawn says, before he's snatched away by a Nurse Joy and her team of Chansey onto a gurney.

She tries to follow after him before another Nurse gets in her way. "Don't worry," the Joy starts, "he's going to get taken care of now –"

The Nurse Joy stops mid-sentence. Dawn looks up.

Oh, she realizes, standing in the middle of the Pokecenter with Hisuian clothes that have enough rips in them, she's getting mistaken for a wild pokémon attack victim.

And then Nurse Joy asks, "Champion Dawn?" in a faint voice, and the rest of the trainers in the Pokecenter start yelling, and it's sheer pandemonium.

Cynthia sweeps in to save the day, her media-ready smile firmly in place. It lasts long enough to clear out the Nurses and the Officers in the room.

Then it falls, and strong arms are folding her into a hug, and Dawn lets herself slump.

"Champion Cynthia," Uncle Ingo says from somewhere behind her.

"Hello, Subway Master Ingo," Cynthia says, on top of things as usual. Her ribs rumble as she speaks and Dawn presses her ear closer to listen. "I've already alerted the Unovan Elite Four and my people have gotten in contact with your brother's people. He's already on his way."

Cynthia looks like Volo. No, it's Volo who looks like Cynthia, who had stolen her face and done those terrible things. But Dawn knows Cynthia, knows from the way her hands maneuver around the bandages and the aches that Dawn had forgotten about until the Nurse

Joy had asked about it, that the descendant could not be further from the ancestor.

It makes her smile.

Cynthia squeezes her shoulders one more time before she lets go. She doesn't go far, just sits in the chair at the foot of Dawn's bed, so that she isn't in the middle of Ingo and Dawn.

"Now, you *have* to tell me," Cynthia says, "where in the world have you two been?"

Dawn looks at Uncle Ingo. Uncle Ingo looks back.

"We got thrown into the past," she tells Cynthia without looking away from Uncle Ingo, whose eyes start crinkling in his version of a smile. "And then we finished Arceus's quest and bullied them afterwards to come back home."

There's silence in the room.

Eventually, Cynthia sighs. "It says a lot about our lives," she says wryly and just a little sad, which is a little confusing, "that that makes sense. Did you have a good time at least?"

Uncle Ingo looks startled at that, but Dawn just laughs, now back on steadier ground. "Cynthia, you would not *believe* the time we had."

They must have been in the air or maybe even Teleported part of the way, because when the hospital door slams open, Cynthia needs to duck as an Uncle Ingo dressed in white rushes past her.

"*INGO!*" Uncle Ingo's presumable brother yells, sobbing. He's only audible because he's fully shouting, even louder than the crowd in the hallway that they can suddenly hear.

And then what Dawn had thought impossible happens: Uncle Ingo's eyes fill with tears.

"*Emmet*," he breathes, and is practically flattened on the bed as his brother throws himself on him in his enthusiasm.

A lady in yellow slips through the door after him. Dawn sees a full hallway behind her, people only barely held back by a wall of Officers and what looks like Cynthia's Garchomp, before the door closes. The hallway sound cuts off mid-yells.

Ah, hospital grade soundproofing for privacy. Dawn had missed it while in Hisui and hadn't even realized until now just how much.

The lady stares at Uncle Ingo for a long moment, long enough for Cynthia to right her chair and move it more towards Dawn's bed than Uncle Igno's, before she seems to register the rest of the people in the room. "Champion Cynthia," she greets, and then, "You're Dawn?"

Dawn watches Cynthia out of the corner of her eye, but she doesn't give any hints, either way. So she breathes in deep, and says, "Yes."

"Dawn," the lady says again, and now she's tearing up too. "My name is Elesa. I'm the Nimbasa City Gym Leader, of Unova. Thank you for bringing Ingo back to us."

"I wouldn't have left him behind," she replies immediately, because that's something that needs to be set straight. Uncle Ingo and his brother have calmed down a little bit, now just murmuring to each other every so often, but she can feel Uncle Ingo's attention on her anyway. She wants him to know this. "Uncle needed help while he was in my region, and I could help, so I did."

"You did more than just *help*," Uncle Ingo calls out from under his brother's weight, only slightly muffled.

At the same time Miss Elesa asks, "Uncle? Your *region*?" and Cynthia droops in her chair, shoulders slumping.

"Not Sinnoh," Dawn clarifies, because that's important. "Hisui. But I was Champion, so it was my job. It was my honor, Miss Elesa."

Miss Elesa stares. Uncle Ingo's brother, presumably Mr. Emmet, stares.

Cynthia puts her head in her hands. "Dawn," she says slowly. "You know I am very proud of you, yes?"

Dawn blinks, because no, she hadn't known that.

"And knowing this," Cynthia continues, "how many Legendaries did you beat up?"

Dawn shrugs. "Does it matter?"

And for the second time since they arrived back in the present, in the Pokecenter, there's pandemonium.

Dawn catches Uncle Ingo's eye in the mania and smiles.

Slowly, cautiously, his eyes still damp with tears, he smiles back.

End Notes

This story is part of the LLF Comment Project, which was created to improve communication between readers and authors. This author invites and appreciates feedback, including:

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